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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NAIROBI 000499

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DEPT FOR AF/E AND A/S FRAZER

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SUBJECT: Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia

Classified by PolOff Mitch Benedict for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

Summary

¶1. (C) The Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) is increasingly distancing itself from extremist leaders of some Shabaab factions and is receiving considerable attention from the international community as an organized opposition block to the TFG. Against this backdrop, Prime Minister Hussein and some cabinet members are reaching out to opposition elements both inside and outside Mogadishu. President Yusuf, however, appears less than supportive of Hussein's efforts and it is unclear if the various blocks of the ARS will be able to achieve consensus on specific issues beyond the demand for Ethiopian withdrawal. End Summary

Background

¶2. (SBU) The Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) is an umbrella organization of ethnic Somalis united primarily in opposition to perceived Darod/Harti domination of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and Ethiopia's intervention in Somalia. The ARS consists of former Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) members, former TFG members of parliament, civil society/unaffiliated political leaders, and members of the Somali diaspora. Former CIC members and former TFG members for parliament constitute the majority of the ARS.

¶3. (C) The ARS is structured similarly to the former CIC and consists of an approximately 10 to 13 member Executive Council and a 191 member Central Committee. The Executive Council operates as the administrative arm of the ARS and contains a number of cabinet-type posts such as Foreign Affairs, Social Affairs, and Military Affairs. Although former TFG leaders and former CIC leaders hold similar numbers of posts within the alliance, our contacts tell us civil society and diaspora members within the ARS tend to be sympathetic to the former CIC block, probably giving former CIC leaders a slight advantage in terms influence within the ARS.

Former TFG Members of Parliament

¶4. (C) Dozens of MPs who supported the Khartoum process and negotiations with the CIC, and who consistently opposed Ethiopian military intervention, left the Transitional Federal Parliament beginning in the fall of 2006. While the MP block, which contacts tell us makes up slightly less than half of the ARS, remains deeply skeptical of President Yusuf, many appear encouraged by the new Prime Minister and the new cabinet. They are receptive to the new government's efforts to reach out to those in opposition to the TFG

and they have told us they are willing to negotiate with the TFG. The MPs have acted as a moderating influence within the ARS. Last year, for example, they successfully convinced CIC members to exclude the use of the word jihad in the ARS mission statement.

Unaffiliated Political Leaders

15. (C) The Asmara-based opposition and much of the civil society community in Mogadishu and Nairobi are sympathetic to ARS criticism of Ethiopia and Darod/Harti domination. And, like the former MPs, many Somalia and Nairobi-based civil society members traditionally critical of the TFG are optimistic about the new Prime Minister and cabinet. In early February Abdirahman Raghe, a prominent Somali civil society leader on the staff of Interpeace, confirmed what many are saying: the current political dynamic represents a significant and positive political shift from the divisive actions of former PM Gedi.

CIC Militia

16. (C) The ARS block made up of former CIC leaders maintains a military wing that is in operation in south central Somalia. However, Ayr leader Mohamad Uluso and other contacts tell us militia affiliated with the former CIC are increasingly devolving back into clan-based militia. The former CIC military wing appears to be maintaining a degree of pragmatic communication and operational coordination with the Shabaab in their fight against a common adversary. However, many former CIC leaders within the ARS increasingly are seen as distancing themselves from extremist leaders of the Shabaab who have connections to al-Qaeda.

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International Attention

17. (C) The ARS was officially declared in September 2007 and has since received considerable attention from the international community as an organized opposition block within the wider opposition, which includes many Hawiye, Darod, and Rahaweyn subclans. Nick Pyle, British Counselor for Somali Affairs, met in mid-February in Cairo with ARS leaders, including Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, Sharif Hassan, and Jama Ali Jama. Pyle, along with Nairobi-based Swedish and French diplomats, sought a face-to-face meeting with senior ARS leaders in an effort to find common ground for direct dialogue between the TFG and ARS.

18. (C) According to Pyle, ARS Chairman Sheikh Sharif said that once a framework for Ethiopian withdrawal had been agreed the ARS would enter into negotiations with the TFG about a political solution. In response to Pyle's suggestion that the ARS come to Nairobi for further talks with the SRSG, the ARS agreed to proxy talks and appointed former Puntland President, MP, and ARS member Jama Ali Jama as the liaison with the international community. Key ARS leaders, such as Sheikh Sharif and Sharif Hassan, have in recent weeks sought to distance the ARS from the Shabaab, most likely in an effort to garner greater political credibility among the international community.

Tensions Between the Shabaab and the ARS

19. (C) Several of our contacts who are sympathetic to the wider opposition have told us the Hawiye clan and leaders of the ARS do not trust Shabaab leader Aden Ayrow and are fearful of assassination by him. In recent weeks Ayrow, and Mukhtar Robow (another Shabaab faction leader), have repeatedly rejected the ARS because of its political strategy, citing the ARS's willingness to negotiate with the TFG. In January, Indha Adde, ARS Defense Chairman in charge of predominately CIC-ARS forces, publicly rejected Robow's assertion

that fighting in Mogadishu is on behalf of global jihad. Indications since are that Indha Adde has broken from Ayrow and Robow. Sheikh Sharif, the former Chairman of the Executive Committee of the CIC and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the ARS, also recently publicly renounced both Ayrow and Robow.

Negotiation Prospects

¶10. (C) Against the backdrop of a growing rift between extremist leaders of some Shabaab factions and the ARS, Prime Minister Hussein and some cabinet members are reaching out to opposition elements both inside and outside Mogadishu. The Prime Minister has engaged successfully with Mogadishu business leaders and the media and he managed in late January to convince Ethiopian forces to pull out of some neighborhoods to allow displaced persons to return home. World Food Program officials tell us there is an improved "tone" from the TFG regarding aid delivery. The Prime Minister recently told us he is willing to talk to those in opposition to the TFG, including some within the Shabaab.

¶11. (C) In a mid-February press interview Hussein said he thinks terrorist elements represent only a small portion of the current armed opposition to the TFG. He said he views violent opposition to the TFG as largely due to a lack of power-sharing and, therefore, he thinks it is possible to negotiate with most of the opposition. He has told us the same privately. Somalis, in general, and leaders in opposition to the TFG appear cautiously optimistic. In mid-February, Farah Maalim, the Kenyan Deputy Speaker of Parliament who is well connected to the CIC and ARS told us ARS leaders are ready to talk if Hussein is sincere in his outreach efforts. However, Maalim added that the ARS is skeptical President Yusuf and the Ethiopians will allow real negotiation to move forward.

Comment

¶12. (C) President Yusuf consistently has assured us he is supportive of the Prime Minister's reconciliation efforts. However, in press statements made prior to his return on February 17 to Mogadishu, Yusuf described most of the conflict in terms of terrorism, suggesting that Yusuf may be less than fully supportive of Hussein's efforts. In what was apparently a well planned and coordinated effort, the armed opposition greeted Yusuf's return to Villa Somalia (the presidential residence) with heavy fire. Presidential staff were on the phone with SE Yates while the attack was underway, and

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they reported heavy casualties as attackers scaled the walls and attacked the compound. Abdirizak Adam the President's Chief of Staff, said the attack was evidence that the PM's reconciliation efforts were at best misguided, and at worst gave succor to terrorists.

¶13. (C) Additionally, warlord and current Mogadishu Mayor Mohamed Dheere has publicly said he is unhappy with the Prime Minister's actions in Mogadishu. Our contacts tell us that when Hussein left for the African Union summit in Addis Ababa, Dheere's militia moved into neighborhoods the Ethiopians had previously vacated. (Comment: Dheere maintains a private militia that operates outside the command and control of any greater TFG force. End Comment) Hussein has said several times publicly, and he has told us privately (Septel), that he views Mohamed Dheere and other prominent warlords inside the TFG as part of the problem. However, it remains unclear whether he has sufficient power or authority to mitigate their influence.

¶14. (C) It also is unclear if the various ARS blocks will be able to achieve consensus on any specific issue beyond the demand for Ethiopian withdrawal, seemingly a prerequisite for real political negotiations to occur with the TFG. On the one hand, the possibility of political negotiation appears to be pushing a wedge between the extremist leaders of some Shabaab factions and the wider alliance. On the other, the lack of political progress on negotiations or the wider opposition's perception they are all being lumped together under the charge of terrorism, risks pushing extremist leaders such

as Ayrow and Robow and the wider opposition back together. As the TFG's mandate draws to a close, the wider opposition will have decreasing incentive to negotiate. Thus we find ourselves at one more critical but fleeting juncture for Somalis, with the support of the international community, to take advantage of the current political environment.

RANNEBERGER